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PROPOSALS

FOR

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In Two Volumes in Octavo,

The following Miscellaneous TRACTS,

Written by Mr. JOHN DENNIS.

I. THE Advancement and Reformation of
Modern Poetry.

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from *Shakspeare*.

IV. An Answer to Mr. Collier's Short View of
the Stage.

V. Letters concerning the Stage and Players.

II.
Letters, never before Printed, on several Subjects.

I. On the Sublimity and the Original Character
of the *Paradise Lost* of *Milton*.

II. Defence of Mr. *Wycherley's* Ridiculous Cha-
racters in the *Country Wife*, and the *Plain Dealer*.

III. On the present State of *Parnassus*.

IV. On Virtue.

V. On the Immortality of the Soul.

VI. Against Drinking.

VII. On the Harmony of the *English* Poetry

VIII. Several Familiar Letters.

IX. Letters from several Persons to the Author,
viz. 1. From the late Mr. *Prior*. 2. From the
late *Walter Moyle*, Esq. 3. From the late Mr.
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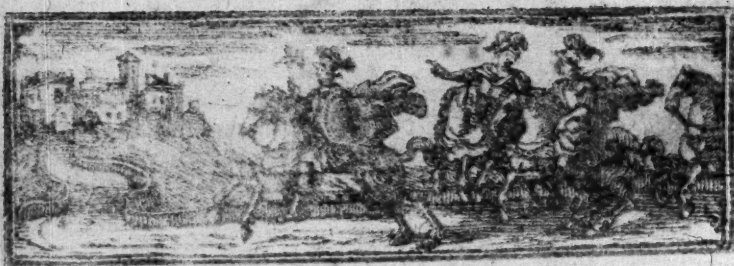
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LETTER I

POSTERVATIONS

PARADISE LOST OF MILTON



some Facts which I shall
 know the Truth of
 to you, because you
 resolv'd to direct them
 Left of Milton than I
 ons on the Paradise
 make some Observan-
 mind within my self to
 Was no sooner deter-

be oblig'd to relate, and because I have ob-
 serv'd in you a better Taste of the great
 Poetry than in most of those with whom I
 have lately convers'd which having pre-
 serv'd



LETTER I.
OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
PARADISE LOST of MILTON.

To Dr. S—

S I R,



Was no sooner determin'd within my self to make some Observations on the *Paradise Lost* of *Milton*, than I resolv'd to direct them to you, because you know the Truth of some Facts which I shall be oblig'd to relate, and because I have observ'd in you a better Taste of the greater Poetry, than in most of those with whom I have lately convers'd; which having pre-

B mis'd,

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mis'd, I shall without more Preamble enter upon the Subject of which I design to treat.

I believe, Sir, that I have told you more than once, that I, who have all my Lifetime had the highest Esteem for the great Genius's of the Ancients, and especially for *Homer* and *Virgil*, and who admire them now more than ever, have yet for these last Thirty Years admir'd *Milton* above them all for one thing, and that is for having carried away the Prize of Sublimity from both Ancients and Moderns: And in most of the Treatises which I have publish'd for Thirty Years, even in those in which I have been unhappily engag'd to detect and to blame the Errors of some of my Contemporaries, I have not been able to forbear pointing at several of the matchless Beauties of *Milton*. In the *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, I cited at large the sublime Description of *Satan* in the first Book of that Poem; and the Speech of that fallen Arch-Angel in the fourth, which begins with that noble Apostrophe to the Sun.

In the *Advancement and Reformation of modern Poetry*, which was publish'd in 1700, I shew'd the vast Advantage which *Milton* had over *Ovid*, and ev'n *Virgil* himself, in his Description of *Chaos* and the Creation.

In the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, which Book was publish'd in 1704, you know very well, Sir, that I cited at large the Description

Description of the Descent of *Raphael* in the fifth Book, and the glorious Hymn to the Creator in the same Book, and likewise the divine Colloquy between God and *Adam* in the eighth Book.

Some Persons, who long since the Publication of the foremention'd Treatises began to write Notes on the *Paradise Lost*, have made particular mention of the same Beauties which I had mark'd out before, without making any mention of me. Tho' you know very well, Sir, that I can bring unquestionable Proof that those Persons had read the foremention'd Treatises, and read them with Applause; but I should not be in the least concern'd at the treating me so unfairly and ungenerously, if they had done Justice to *Milton*, thro' the Course of their Criticisms, of which they have grossly fail'd in the following Respects.

I. They have not allow'd that *Milton* in the Sublimity of his Thoughts surpass'd both Ancients and Moderns.

II. In their Observations which they have made on the *Paradise Lost*, they have insisted too much upon things in which *Milton* has Equals, instead of dwelling intirely on that Sublimity which is his distinguishing and Characteristick Quality, and which sets him above Mankind.

III. In citing Passages from him which are truly sublime, they have often fail'd of set-

ring his Sublimity in a true Light, and of shewing it to all its Advantage.

IV. In those Passages whose Sublimity they have set in a true Light, they have not observ'd, to the Honour of *Milton*, and our Country, that the Thoughts and Images are Original, and the genuine Offspring of *Milton's* transcendent Genius.

V. They have not shewn how *Milton's* Sublimity is distinguish'd from that of all other Poets in this Respect, that where he has excell'd all other Poets in what he has exprest, he has left ten times more to be understood than what he has exprest, which is the surest and noblest Mark, and the most transporting Effect of Sublimity.

To shew that they who have writ Observations on the *Paradise Lost*, have not done Justice to *Milton*, with regard to the five foremention'd Articles, is the Design and Subject of the Letters I intend to send you, which shall rather be frequent than long, my Design being to amuse and entertain you, and not to fatigue and tire you.

Decem. 9, 1721

I am, &c.



LET-

LETTER II.

Observations on the PARADISE LOST
of MILTON.

To Dr. S—

S I R,

I Affirmed in my last that the Persons who had writ Comments upon the *Paradise Lost* of Milton, had not done Justice to the great Author in several Respects which are there particulariz'd. And,

First and principally in this, that they have not acknowledg'd that he has born away the Prize of Sublimity from both Ancients and Moderns.

What I asserted in my former, I shall endeavour to prove in this, but on this Condition, that you will give me your Opinion of what I write to you, with that Frankness and that Unreservedness which is due to our Friends, whenever they consult us, and depend upon our Judgment and our Sincerity.

Of all the Commentators on the *Paradise Lost*, Mr. Addison was certainly the most

most ingenious, if he was not the most learned, but he has not given *Milton* his full Due, either thro' want of Discernment, or want of Impartiality. In the 17th Page of the small Edition of his Notes upon the *Paradise Lost*, he has these Words of the Author:

Milton's chief Talent, and indeed his distinguishing Excellence, lies in the Sublimity of his Thoughts. There are others of the Moderns who rival him in every other part of Poetry; but in the Greatness of his Sentiments he triumphs over all the Poets both Moderns and Ancients, Homer only excepted.

But as when a Man departs from Truth, which is the only bond of Union and Agreement, both of our Sentiments with those of others, and of our Sentiments with themselves, he is ready immediately to differ from, and to grow inconsistent with himself; Mr. *Addison*, who expressly here either equals or prefers *Homer* for the Greatness of his Sentiments before *Milton*, contradicts himself at least no less than twice in the Course of his Observations: for says he, in the 7th Page of the foresaid Edition, *There is an indisputable and unquestion'd Magnificence in every part of Paradise Lost, and indeed a much greater than could have been form'd upon any Pagan System. Now if there is a greater Magnificence in every Part of Milton's Poem, there is by Consequence a*

greater

greater Sublimity than there is in the *Iliads*, which was form'd upon a *Pagan* System.

Again in the 92d Page of the foreſaid Edition, Mr. *Addiſon*, ſpeaking of the Excellence of *Milton's* Performance in the Sixth Book of his Poem, delivers himſelf thus:

Milton's Genius, which was ſo great in it ſelf, and ſo ſtrengthened by all the helps of Learning, appears in this Book every way equal to his Subject, which is the moſt ſublime that could enter into the Thoughts of a Poet.

Now, Sir, if *Milton's* Subject is the moſt ſublime that could enter into the Thoughts of a Poet, and his Genius is every way equal to his Subject; it follows that *Milton* is more exalted than any Poet who has not a Subject ſo elevated, and conſequently than *Homer*, or any other Poet ancient or modern.

But as in the 91ſt Page of the foreſaid Comment, Mr. *Addiſon* takes a great deal of Pains to ſhew the Greatneſs of one particular Paſſage of *Homer*, and to deſcribe it, after *Longinus*, in all thoſe choſen Circumſtances, which may make it appear to be noble and exalted, which Pains he has not taken with any other Paſſage, we may reaſonably conclude that he believ'd this to be the moſt lofty of any that are in the Works of *Homer*, as indeed it really is: Now as there is a Paſſage in the 6th Book of *Paradiſe Loſt*, which was produced upon a parallel

parallel Occasion, let us see if we cannot find by comparing them, for the Honour of our Country, that the Passage of our *Briton* is as much superior to that of the *Grecian*, as the Angels of the one are more potent than the other's Gods, or as the *Empyrean* Heaven is more exalted than *Ossa*, *Pelion* or *Olympus*.

In order to this, Sir, give me leave to lay before you the Words which Mr. *Addison* makes use of to set forth the masterly Strokes of *Homer*. After he has told us, that there is no question, but that *Milton* had heated his Imagination with the Fight of the Gods in *Homer*, before he enter'd upon the Engagement of the Angels (of which, by the way, I do not believe one Syllable; I would sooner believe the greatest Absurdities of the *Alcoran*) he is pleas'd to add what follows:

Homer there gives us a Scene of Men, Heroes, and Gods, mix'd together in Battle. Mars animates the contending Armies, and lifts up his Voice in such a manner, that it is heard distinctly amidst all the Shouts and Confusion of the Fight. Jupiter at the same time thunders over their Heads, while Neptune raises such a Tempest, that the whole Field of Battle and all the Tops of the Mountains shake about them. The Poet tells us, that Pluto himself, whose Habitation was in the very Center of the Earth, was

so affrighted at the Shock, that he leapt from his Throne. Homer afterwards describes Vulcan as pouring down a Storm of Fire upon the River Xanthus, and Minerva as throwing a Rock at Mars, who he settles us cover'd seven Acres in his fall.

With these imaginary *ne plus ultra's* had Mr. Addison so fill'd his Capacity, that when ten thousand greater Beauties are before his Eyes, he stops short of them, and never in the least discerns them, as you will see immediately; for thus he goes on:

As Homer has introduc'd into his *Battle of the Gods* every thing that is great and terrible in Nature, Milton has fill'd his *Fight of good and bad Angels* with all the like Circumstances of Horror. The Shout of Armies, the Rattling of brazen Chariots, the hurling of Rocks and Mountains, the Earthquake, the Fire, the Thunder, are all of them employ'd to lift up the Reader's Imagination, and give him a suitable Idea of so great an Action. With what Art doth the Poet represent the whole Body of the Earth trembling, even before it was created.

Thus with this very pretty trifling Remark does Mr. Addison stop short, within the very touch of one of the vastest and the sublimest Beauties that ever was inspir'd by the God of Verse, or by Milton's Godlike Genius; when the very next Lines, the very next Words, strike and astonish us with such

wonderful Ideas, as are able to lift up the Reader's Imagination to a thousand times a greater Height than either the Shout of Armies, the Rattling of brazen Chariots, the hurling of Rocks and Mountains, the Earthquake, the Fire, or the Thunder. But that these Beauties may be seen in all their Lustre, and in all their Glory, give me leave to set the whole Passage before you.

*Th' Arch-Angel's Trumpet through the vast
of Heav'n*

*Resounded, and the faithful Armies rang
Hosanna to the Highest: nor stood at gaze
The adverse Legions, nor less hideous join'd
The horrid Shock: now storming Fury rose
And Clamour, such as heard in Heav'n till now
Was never, Arms on Armour clashing bray'd
Horrible Discord, and the madding Wheels
Of brazen Chariots rag'd; Dire was the
Noise*

*Of Conflict; over head the dismal Hiss
Of fiery Darts in flaming Vortices flew,
And flying gaul'd either Host with Fire.
So under fiery Cope together rush'd
Both Battles main, with ruinous Assault
And inextinguishable Rage; all Heav'n
Resounded, and had Earth been then, all
Earth*

*Had to her Center shook: What Wonder?
when*

*Millions of fierce encountring Angels fought
On*

*On either side, the least of whom could wield
These Elements, and arm him with the force
Of all their Regions.*

But now, Sir, if Millions of fierce encountring Angels fought on either Side, and the very least, the very weakest of so many Millions had Power to rend this Globe of Earth and Ocean from its Axle, and whirl it with its dependent Atmosphere thro' the Æthereal Regions, what must be the unutterable, the inconceivable Effect of so many Millions furiously contending against each other, and each of them exerting all his might for Victory? When

*Each on himself relied,
As only on his Arm the Moment lay
Of Victory.*

These are amazing, these are astonishing Ideas, worthy of the great Original Fight, the Battle of the *Empyrean*.

But now, Sir, if the least, if the weakest of so many Millions as fought on either Side, had Strength to remove this Globe of Earth with its dependent Elements, what could not the greatest of them, what could not *Lucifer*, what could not the Prince of the Arch-angels, *Michael's* next to Almighty Arm do? The following Lines, and our own Reflections on them, may a little help to inform us.

Long time in even Scale
 The Battle hung, till Satan, who that Day
 Prodigious Power had shewn, and met in
 Arms
 No Equal, ranging through the dire Attack
 Of fighting Seraphim confus'd, at length
 Saw where the Sword of Michael smote and
 fell'd
 Squadrons at once.

But now, Sir, of whom were these Squa-
 drons? Why,

Squadrons of those the least of whom could
 wield
 These Elements, and arm him with the Force
 Of all their Regions.

What must the Power of that Arch-angel
 be, who with one Stroke of his Sword could
 fell whole Squadrons of those,

The least of whom could wield these Elements,
 And arm him with the Force of all their
 Regions?

But let us proceed to the Combat of the
 two Arch-angels, and we shall see something
 more in a Passage that is wonderfully sub-
 lime, and worthy the Mouth of the Angel
 who relates it.

They

*They ended Parle, and both addrest for Fight
 Unspeakable; for who, tho' with the Tongue
 Of Angels, can relate, or to what Things
 Liken on Earth conspicuous, that may lift
 Human Imagination to such height
 Of Godlike Power. For likest Gods they seem'd,
 Stood they or mov'd, in Stature, Motion,
 Arms*

*Fit to decide the Empire of great Heaven.
 Now wav'd their fiery Swords, and in the Air
 Made horrid Circles; two broad Suns their
 Shields*

*Blaz'd opposite, while Expectation stood
 In horror; from each Hand with speed re-
 tir'd*

*Where erst was thickest Fight, th' Angelic
 Throng,
 And left large Field, unsafe within the Wind
 Of such Commotion.*

Now who were these that retir'd with so much Speed, and could not bear the very Wind of the Weapons of the two Arch-angels, and were threatned with Destruction by their very Motion? Why, this Angelick Throng were the same whom the Angel mention'd above;

*The least of whom could wield these Elements,
 And arm him with the Force of all their
 Regions.*

So that we find, computing by just Proportion, that *Michael* the Prince of the Arch-angels, or *Lucifer* before his Fall, had Might enough to confound and destroy in a Moment the whole Dominion of the Sun, to crush all the Planetary World depending on him, and whirling them through the immense Regions of the Sky, to scatter and disperse them in empty infinite Space. These, Sir, are vast, these are prodigious Conceptions; and the Poet was so sensible that his Genius, though mighty as ever was that of a Mortal, and seeming to be inspir'd by that very Angel whom he introduces relating this, he was so sensible that his Genius sunk under his vast Conceptions, that when he compares the two contending Arch-angels to two Planetary Worlds broke loose, and crushing and confounding each other, and sees this Image so vast in itself, and yet so little answering to his vaster Idea, he finds himself oblig'd to express himself as follows.

*From each band with speed retir'd
Where first was thickest Fight, th' Angelick
Throng,
And left large Field, unsafe within the Wind
Of such Commotion, such as to set forth
Great Things by small, if Nature's Concord
broke,
And War among the Constellations sprung,
Two Planets rushing with Aspect malign*

Of

Of fiercest Opposition in mid Sky,
Should combat, and their jarring Spheres
confound.

The Conflict of two Worlds crushing
and confounding each other, appear'd but
trivial and light to him, to express his Idea
of the Combat of the two Arch-angels; and
therefore he says, that he's oblig'd to set
forth Great things by Small.

What immediately follows accounts for
all this, and is transcendently Sublime.

Together both with next to Almighty Arm
Implac'd, imminent, one Stroke they aim'd,
That might determine, and not need repeat
As not of Power at once.

That Expression with next to Almighty
Arm, includes more than the Thoughts of
the greatest Reader can ever comprehend;
which recalls to my Remembrance, that no-
ble, that wonderful Image, which the Poet
gives of Satan, in the second Book of this
exalted Poem.

The Stygian Council thus dissolv'd, and forth
In order came the grand infernal Peers,
Midst came their mighty Paramount, and
seem'd
Alone th' Antagonist of Heav'n.

I defy any one to name any thing so sublime in *Homer*, as the latter End of this Passage above.

I am sensible, that this Letter runs into too great a Length, and 'tis high time to conclude it. I have endeavour'd to prove in it, that there is a Sublimity in *Milton's* Battle of Angels, infinitely superiour to that which is in the Battle of *Homer's* Gods and Heroes in the twentieth Iliad: And as I have set sublime Beauties before you, of which neither Mr. *Addison*, nor my Lord *Roscommon*, have taken the least Notice, so in my next I shall make an Objection which has not been yet made. If I have any where pass'd the Bounds of the Epistolary or the Didactic Stile, you will have the Goodness to consider, that it was next to impossible to resist the violent Emotions which the Greatness of the Subject rais'd in me.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.
 P. S. I have the appearance of some inconsistency and contradiction, for in them the P. S. is to be found Body and Mind, Spirit and Matter. At the latter End of the first Book we find the Passage:

LETTER

I defy any one to name any thing to sub-
lime in Homer, as the latter End of this Pas-

I am sensible, that this Letter runs into

LETTER III.

*Observations on the PARADISE LOST
of MILTON.*

To Dr. S.

AS in my last I endeavour'd to shew
Beauties in *Milton*, which no one had
taken Notice of before me, and greater Beau-
ties than any which I believe had been taken
Notice of: I shall in this lay before you an
Objection, which no one that I know of
has made against those very Machines of
Milton, from the Force and Power of which
those sublime Beauties were drawn.

Most of the Machines then in *Paradise
Lost*, have the appearance of something that
is inconsistent and contradictory, for in them
the Poet seems to confound Body and
Mind, Spirit and Matter. At the latter End
of the first Book we find this Passage,

*Thus incorporeal Spirits to smallest Forms
Reduce their Shapes immense.*

D

Now

the most important
made to the greatest of our English Poets
Now Form and Shape suppose Extension,
and Extension implies Matter. Besides, he
has given them solid Arms and Armour,
which can be employ'd by Body only, as
Helmet, Spear, Shield, Sword, and has shewn
both his good and his bad Angels Cap-a-pee
in Armour.

To which all the Answer that can reason-
ably be made is, That both the good and the
bad Angels, though in themselves pure Spi-
rits and uncompounded Essences, yet on oc-
casion, either voluntarily assume Bodies, or
by superiour Power and divine Command
are oblig'd to assume them. And that this
was Milton's Notion of the thing, the fol-
lowing Verses in the first Book incline us to
believe.

*Spirits, when they please,
Can either Sex assume, or both; so soft
And uncompounded is their Essence pure,
Not ty'd or manacled with Joint or Limb,
Nor founded on the brittle Strength of Bones,
Like cumb'rous Flesh; but in what Shapes
they please,
Dilated or condens'd, bright or obscure,
Can execute their airy Purposes,
And works of Love or Enmity fulfill.*

This is the best Answer I can give to the
Objection I have made, and if you are not
satisfy'd with it, I desire you would send me
your own; for it concerns us to invalidate
the

the most important Objection that can be made to the greatest of our *English* Poets, and perhaps against most of the *Machines* which are employ'd in the *Christian* Poetry. And here let me deplore one Unhappiness that attends our modern Poetry: For tho' the *Machines* with which the *Christian* Religion supplies us, must be allow'd to be greater, more wonderful, and more terrible, than any which the *Pagan* Religion affords us, they are less delightful: For that which comes nearest to humane Nature, must in Poetry be most delightful to it; but the *Gods* and *Goddesses* of the *Grecian* and *Roman* Poetry, being feign'd to have manifest Bodies, and apparent humane Shapes, and the agreeable Distinction of Sexes, come incomparably nearer to humane Nature, than the *Machines* of the *Christian* Poetry, and are therefore more delightful to it; and likewise for the following Reason, because we have, beyond all Comparison, more clear and distinct Ideas of them, than we have of the *Christian* *Machines*.

Jan. 24. 1727.

I am, Yours, &c.

POSTSCRIPT

I Am sorry, that while I was writing what is above, it was not in my Thoughts to acquaint you, that there seems to me to be a vast Difference between some of the *Machines* of *Milton* and others, with regard to their Justness: When the good Angels,

gels, first *Raphael*, and afterwards *Michael*, were feigned by the Poet to be commanded by God to appear before our first Parents, it was very justly supposed by him that they assumed Bodies, and that they appear'd to them in some Form that came near to humane Shape, because it is impossible that any thing but Body can be the true Object of humane Sight, and because every Body that appears, must appear in some certain Shape or Form; and *Milton* could know of no Shape that had more Dignity than the humane. But with all the Veneration that I have for this great Poet, I cannot help thinking, that when in the first and second Books of his Poem, which yet are transcendently Sublime, he describes the fall'n Angels in Shapes that come near to humane, and describes them as having three of the five Animal Senses, *vis.* seeing, hearing and feeling; when he paints them after this manner, communing only one with another in their own infernal Regions, immediately after their Fall; and yet acquaints us at the same time that they are incorporeal Beings, and pure and uncompounded Essences; methinks his Paintings, as to that Point, are not so easily to be justified. I know indeed very well, that *Comely* in the first Book of his *Davidis*, and *Tasso* in the fourth Canto of his *Gerusalemme*, have described those fall'n Angels as having Bodies, and something like humane Shapes, though on Occasions on which they commune only with one another in their own infernal Regions. But then, as neither *Comely* nor *Tasso* have formally and expressly declar'd, as *Milton* has expressly and formally done, that those evil Spirits are incorporeal Beings, and pure and uncompounded Essences; they leave the Reader's Imagination free to fancy, that those fall'n Angels have Bodies; and as they assert no Notions that may be taken to be inconsistent, they have avoided the giving their Readers the occasion of believing, that there is in their Descriptions of those fall'n Angels any real Contradiction, or the trouble of shewing, that what is thought to be a real Contradiction, has but the false Appearance of one.

As soon as I heard of this Accusation, I was resolv'd to write a Defence of Mr. Webster, and to direct this Defence to you, for the following Reasons: Because you had a true Esteem for Mr. Webster's Merit, as well as had your humble Servant; Because you are allow'd by all to be an undoubted Judge of the Matter in debate; and Because an express Vindication of Mr. Webster's ridiculous Characters is an implicate one of some of your own.

The

Port to be commanded by God to appear before our first Pa-

A Defence of Mr. Wycherley's Characters in the Plain-dealer.

To William Congreve, Esq;

S I R,
I Have lately heard, with some Indignation, that there are Persons who arraign the ridiculous Characters of our late Friend Mr. Wycherley, for being forsooth too witty; moved I suppose, by the wife Apprehension that they may be of dangerous Example, and spread the Contagion of Wit in this Witty and Politick Age; an Age so very Witty, and so very Politick, that it is always like to be in undetermined Question, whether our Wit has the Advantage of our Politicks, or our Politicks of our Wit.

As soon as I heard of this Accusation, I resolved to write a Defence of Mr. Wycherley, and to direct this Defence to you, for the following Reasons: Because you had a true Esteem for Mr. Wycherley's Merit, as well as had your humble Servant; Because you are allow'd by all to be an undoubted Judge of the Matter in debate; and Because an exprefs Vindication of Mr. Wycherley's ridiculous Characters, is an implicate one of some of your own.

The

The foremention'd Persons pretend that Mr. *Wycherley* is included in the following Censure of the late Duke of *Buckingham*, and a Passage in Mr. *Dryden's* Preface to his Translation of *Fresnoy*.

*Another Fault which often doth befall,
Is when the Wit of some great Poet shall
So overflow, that is he none at all.
That ev'n his Fools speak Sense as if possess'd,
And each by Inspiration breaks his Jest.
If once the Justness of each Part be lost,
Well may we laugh, but at the Poet's Cost.*

Now, Sir, I cannot believe the late Duke of *Buckingham* so much as thought of Mr. *Wycherley* in this severe Censure, not only because the Censure is not true with regard to Mr. *Wycherley*, as shall be prov'd below, but because the Duke, who knew the Value of Money as much as another, would never have done so generous a thing by our deceased Friend, as the lending him 500 l. upon his own single Bond, during his Father's Life-time, if he had look'd upon Mr. *Wycherley* as a ridiculous Author; and he must have look'd upon him as such, if he had believ'd that he did not preserve the Juveness of his Characters.

*If once the Justness of each Part be lost,
Well may we laugh, but at the Poet's Cost.*

But

But let us come to the Passage in Mr. Dryden's Preface to *Fresnoy*, which is in the 43d Page of Lintot's Edition.

I know a Poet (says he) whom out of Respect I will not name, who being too witty himself, could draw nothing but Wits in a certain Comedy of his: even his Fools were infected with the Disease of their Author. They overflow'd with smart Repartees, and were only distinguish'd from the intended Wits by being call'd Coxcombs, tho' they did not deserve so scandalous a Name.

Thus far Mr. Dryden, who in this Passage doth certainly reflect upon Mr. Wycherley, and particularly upon his *Plain-dealer*. But having reason to believe, that this is wrongfully objected to him, I shall vindicate him against Mr. Dryden, and all his Abettors; and make no doubt but I shall make it appear, that by this rash Censure, he has shewn himself no more a capable Judge of Comedy, than just to that Friendship which he profess to have for Mr. Wycherley, or to that Regard which he ought to have had for his own Sentiments, and his own Sincerity. For, Sir, at this rate, what becomes of the Encomium which he has given to you before your *Double-dealer*? What could prevail upon him, in his Verses before that Play, to tell you that you had

The Satire, Wit, and Strength of manly
Wycherley

What could he mean by commending you
 for having the Wit of Mr. Wycherley, if that
 Wit is only a Disease, and serves to no pur-
 pose but to make you falsify your Chara-
 cters? And why should he praise you for
 having Mr. Wycherley's Strength, when that
 Strength, according to him, must be Weak-
 ness in itself? And at this Rate what becomes
 of his Advice to Mr. Southey, before a
 certain Play of his,

But if thou wouldst be feared as well as read,
Copy and living what heary and one dead
The Standard of thy Style let Etheridge
For it is, th' Immortal Spring of Wycherley

I always thought till now, that there was
 a very wide difference between a Disease and
 Immortality, and am still inclin'd to believe,
 that if copying the Wit of Mr. Wycherley
 was necessary to make another succeed, the
 Original could neither be absurd nor im-
 proper in Mr. Wycherley himself.

And, Sir, at this rate, what becomes of
 the Character which Mr. Dryden formerly
 gave Mr. Wycherley in his Preface to the
State of Innocence? where he declares the
 Author of the *Plain-dealer* to be the great-
 est Comick Poet of the Age, one whom he
 is proud to call his Friend, and one who by
 the

the just and general Satire contain'd in that very Comedy, had oblig'd all virtuous Men, as well as all Lovers of Poetry.

This is the Substance of that Passage, which I cannot pretend to give verbatim, because I have not seen the Play for several Years, but you have the Sense and Meaning faithfully. And now, Sir, of what Force can the Passage in the Preface to *Fryscob* be against Mr. Wycherley, when 'tis plain that Mr. Dryden himself has three times contradicted it?

If the Business were to be decided by Authority, there would not be very great ones wanting to justify Mr. Wycherley. As first, that of George Duke of Buckingham, who writ the *Rehearsal*, who not only shew'd his Judgment by writing that celebrated Play; but shew'd the Esteem which he had for Mr. Wycherley, by the Benefits which he conferr'd on him, and by his frequent conversing with him.

Next follows John Earl of Rochester, who, if he was a true Judge of any sort of Poetry, it was certainly of Comedy. Now he in his Imitation of the tenth Satire of the first Book of Horace, told us that

None have touch'd lately on true Comedy,

But hasty Shadwell, and slow Wycherley.

Anon he adds,

*But Wycherley earns his due rate in his gain; A
He wants no judgment, and he spares no
Pains.*

as soon as they are not so much as
 by *Mr. Shadwell*, who could not but have a
 true Taste of Comedy, since he was so just a
 Writer of it, in tells his Audience in his
 Prologue to *Bury Fair*, are enabled to

— *The Plain-Dealer*, and *Sir Fopling* you
 Have seen, and must have applauded too.

I could bring the Authority of Persons
 who are now living; I could bring indisposi-
 table ones, as my Lord *Langdown*, *Mr. O*
Prior, and your own.

But if any one is presumptuous enough to
 pretend, that all these are mistaken, while
 he himself is in the right, if it is allged by
 him, that no Authorities, and not the great
 est, are of any Force against Reason and Ma-
 ter of Facts, and that this Reason and Ma-
 ter of Fact, which have been hid from so
 many discerning Judges, have been evident
 to him alone; I shall endeavour to prove
 two things both by Reason and Facts, con-
 trary to the Objections of this presumptu-
 ous Accuser, and the foreseid Censure of
Mr. Dryden; and these are, first, that *Mr.*
Wycherley's Coxcombs are really Coxcombs,
 and very justly deserve that scandalous Name;
 and secondly, that they are not only fairly,
 but vastly distinguished from the intended
 Wits, from the Looseness of their Conversa-
 tion.

First, then, *Mr. Wycherley's Coxcombs*
 are really Coxcombs. And here we must ob-
 serve, that Fool and Wit are so far from
 being Terms that are indompatible or con-
 tradictory,

contradictory, that they are not so much as
 Terms of Opposition, others being several
 Persons who are call'd Wits, and who by
 the Vigour and Fire of their Constitutions
 are enabled sometimes to say what they call
 smart and witty things, who have not one
 grain of Judgment or Discernment to di-
 stinguish Right from Wrong, or Truth from
 Falshood; and that therefore the good IRe-
 flection of *Rotbescoucauk* is certainly very just
*On est quelque fois un sot avec de l'Esprit, mais
 on ne l'est jamais avec du jugement.* It
 may happen (says he) that a Man may be a
 Fool who has Wit, but he never can be in
 who has Judgment. The Vanity of those
 whom they call Wits has made them pre-
 tend that there is a full Opposition between
 Wit and Fools. But the only true and full
 Opposition is between him that is a Fool
 and him who is Wise; but gainers lib vnam
 they would move not together: for to shew
 the Folly of those whom they call Wits from
 the Conduct of their Lives, because I have
 known several of them whose Actions have
 not been entirely in their Power, but Charles
 known very few of them who have had the
 use of Reason as I do not speak of Authors
 but of those who have got the Reputation of
 Wits, from their liveliness and sometimes
 from the Looseness of their Conversation/
 I have in the course of my Life conversed
 with a great Number of them, but I have
 been acquainted with very few of them who
 being

could argue Logically, when I say Logically, I do not mean Syllogistically or Pedantically, but reasonably, closely and conclusively. I desire in the next Place to observe, that as is the Business of a Comick Poet to correct those Irregularities and Extravagancies of Men's Tempers which make them uneasie to themselves, and troublesome and vexatious to one another, for that very Reason, your witty Fools are very just Subjects of Comedy, because they are more troublesome and shocking in Conversation to Men of Sense, than any other sort of Fools whatsoever. Such a Fool with all his smart Repartees, as Mr. *Dryden* calls them, his snap, snap, his hit for hit, and dash for dash, is but too often impertinent, impudent, insolent, opinionated, noisie, fantastick, abusive, brutal, perfidious, which shows the Solidity of that Reflection of *Rochester* in *Wit's* *Womans* *Sets* *It* *incommodes* *qual* *scum* *quint* *Wde* *It* *is* *first*. "There are no Fools so troublesome as the Fools who have Wit." Now such are Mr. *Wycherley's* Fools in the Comedy of the *Plain-dealer*. My Lord *Playfult*, Major *Oldson*, the Widow *Blackacre*, and *Ferry*, have each of them several of these Qualities and *Nervel* has them all. He is impertinent, impudent, insolent, conceited, noisie, fantastick, abusive, brutal, perfidious. He says nothing but what a brisk Coxcomb may very well be supposed to say who will venture

venture at all, and who having a good Memory keeps the top Company in a Town over-run with Wits, as London was at the Time of the writing of that Comedy. What is said by him and the rest in the several Scenes in which they appear, is either trifling and superficial, or utterly and ridiculously false, or appears to be a Repetition of what the Men of Sense in the Play have said before them; whereas what *Manly*, *Freeman* and *Eliza* say is always sensible, and is therefore always true.

As 'tis the Business of a Comick Poet to paint the Age in which he lives, which if he doth not paint, he doth nothing at all, Mr. *Wycherley* had by no means shewn himself to great a Master in Comedy, as he has done, if he had not brought these witty Fools upon the Stage, because in the Reign of King *Charles* the Second they in all Places abounded. The People whom they call'd Wits were to be had every where, nay were not to be avoided, any more than Toasters, Punsters, and Newsmongers are now-a-days,

but good Sense and Reason were to be found in as few Places then as they are in our Days. But now, Sir, I come to shew that the Coxcombs in the *Plain-dealer* are not only fairly and justly, but vastly distinguish'd from those whom Mr. *Wycherley* design'd for sensible Characters. For *Manly*, *Freeman* and *Eliza* every where make it appear, that with their Wit they have Judgment, and consequently make
great

great and important Observations, and have therefore a thousand times more Wit than the foresaid Coxcombs. For he who has Wit without Judgment is but a half Wit, and therefore has but imperfect Views, and makes but superficial Reflections: whereas he who has Judgment, has home Views, and makes profound Reflections.

And therefore some have been of Opinion that Judgment doth not differ from Wit, unless it be in the Greatness and the Extent of the Light it affords us. *On s'est trompé lors qu'on a cru que l'Esprit et le Jugement étoient deux choses différentes.* (says the Duke of Rochefoucault, Reflection 122.) *Le Jugement n'est que la grandeur de la Lumière de l'Esprit: cette lumière pénètre les fondades choses; elle y remarque tout ce qu'il faut remarquer. Superficielles celles qui semblent imperceptibles; ainsi il faut demeurer d'accord que c'est l'étendue de la lumière de l'Esprit qui produit tous les Effets qu'on attribue au Jugement.* That is, They are deceiv'd who believe that Wit and Judgment are two different things. Judgment is nothing but the Greatness of that Light which the Understanding affords us. It is a Light which pierces to the very Bottom of things, observing every thing in them which ought to be observ'd, and perceiving every thing which was thought to be imperceptible. We ought then to conclude that 'tis the Extent of the Light which the Understanding affords us that

that produces all the Effects which are attributed to the Judgment.

All that we have advanc'd would be manifest as the Day, if we were to go thro' the principal Scenes in which the Characters of either sort appear. I know not but I may persuade my self to do that one Day, provided that what I have already said has the good Fortune to prove agreeable to you. In the mean while I cannot help making one Observation upon the Scene in the second Act, where *Novel* intends to give an Account of the Guests at my Lady *Autumn's* Table, by which it will appear how industriously Mr. *Wycherley* avoided the making his Dramatick Persons speak out of their Characters. For *Novel* who is to give the Account is always interrupted by *Olivio*, that the Wit of that Scene may be in a more proper Mouth than his; yet so quick are the Returns, and so great is the Vivacity of that admirable Scene, that it has dazled and deluded most of his Readers, and prevail'd upon them to imagine, that *Novel* has a full share in the Wit of it, tho' he has not so much as a half quarter share in the very Dialogue of it.

Thus, Sir, I have endeavour'd to defend the *Plain-dealer* against the foresaid Accusation, as far as my present Avocations would give me leave. If it appears to you, who are so great a Judge of these matters, that I am in the right in what I have said, I make no doubt but I have done an agreeable thing to you,

in

in doing Justice to the Merit of our deceased Friend, and setting it in a true Light. But if I happen to be mistaken, which yet I will not believe, till I hear from you, that I am so, I will make no Excuse for my self but what one whom you have the greatest Regard for has already made to my Hand.

*Vellem in amicitia sic erraremus, et isti
Errori, virtus nomen posuisset honestum.*

Hor.

At the same time I am very far from believing that the *Plain-dealer* is a faultless Play, for where is the Play or the Poem that is without Fault? But since these People have not hit on the true Faults, it becomes his Friends to say nothing at all concerning them.

Aug. 1, 1721.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

